



MEMORANDUM

October 22, 2013

TO: Public Safety and Education Committees

FROM: Susan J. Farag, Legislative Analyst 
Essie McGuire, Senior Legislative Analyst 

SUBJECT: **Update: Truancy Court Program**

Those expected for this worksession:

John McCarthy, State's Attorney
Steve Neff, Director of Pupil Personnel Services

BACKGROUND

Created in 2010 as a partnership among the State's Attorney's Office, the Montgomery County Public Schools, and the University of Baltimore School of Law's Center for Families, Children, and the Courts (CCFC), the Truancy Court is a ten-week program designed to increase student attendance by assisting students and their families with issues that impact attendance.

The program meets at the designated schools once a week. The Truancy Court mentor generally meets with the child prior to the Court session. The child also meets individually with the Truancy Court team, which consists of the Truancy Court Judge, an ASA, the Truancy Court coordinator, and the school's Pupil Personnel Worker. The team reviews the child's attendance, grades, school performance, and offers advice and support to help the child become more consistent at attending school daily and punctually.

Initially, the program was operated in two middle schools – Neelsville and Francis Scott Key. After initial successes, the program was expanded to Loiderman last year. The State's Attorney's Office advises it has also expanded to Roberto Clemente and Argyle middle schools this year, for a total of five schools in the 2013-2014 school year.

In order to determine which middle schools may benefit from the program, the SAO meets once a month with other agencies that form the Truancy Review Board. The SAO meets with the Chair of the Truancy Review Board to determine appropriate schools. They examine

schools with high truancy rates and those with students who have more than 15% unexcused absences. In addition, they try to be geographically diverse, and currently have two up-county schools, two down-county schools and one mid-county school.

PARTICIPATION RATES AND RESULTS

During the 2012-2013 school year, between seven and 14 children participated at each school. The following charts show the number of participants, graduation rates, and the resulting reduction in unexcused absences.

Truancy Court Rates - Fall 2012				
School	Participants	Graduates	Graduate Rate	Reduction in Unexcused Absences
Neelsville	14	9	64%	72%
Francis Scott Key	7	3	43%	57%
Loiderman	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total:	21	12	57%	60%

Truancy Court Rates -Spring 2013				
School	Participants	Graduates	Graduate Rate	Reduction in Unexcused Absences
Neelsville	10	5	50%	49%
Francis Scott Key	13	8	62%	70%
Loiderman	7	6	86%	89%
Total:	30	19	63%	69%

FUNDING

The Truancy Court was initially funded through a federal grant in 2010. The Council has appropriated \$52,000 in FY13 and \$78,000 in FY14 for the initiative. The University of Baltimore's CFCC has also received a \$68,000 grant to help operate the program.

TRUANCY COURT JUDGES

Initially, the Truancy Court model was supposed to have local judges function as truancy court judges. The program currently has District Court Judge Sarsfield as the Truancy Court judge at Key Middle School. The other four schools have Assistant State's Attorneys acting as the respective Truancy Court judge. The SAO is currently recruiting attorneys through the local Bar Association.

DISCUSSION ISSUES

1. What are some examples of how the Truancy Court assists children and their families to help a child stay in school and arrive on time?
2. The Joint Committee may wish to ask whether funding is sufficient for the current size of the program. What would be needed to expand?
3. The program currently enrolls seven to 14 kids at each school, each semester. Are these enrollment numbers appropriate for each school's need? Or are there more children at each school who may benefit?
4. What challenges (other than judge participation) has the Truancy Court experienced?
5. What are the Truancy Court's plans moving forward?

This packet contains

State's Attorney's Office responses to questions

University of Baltimore School of Law Truancy Court Overview

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1-2

3-5

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Hello, here are the answers that you have requested.

- 1. When the Committee last met to discuss the Truancy Court program, the SAO had programs in three middle schools: Neelsville, Francis Scott Key, and Loiderman. Council added \$26,000 to the FY14 budget for expansion to another school. Have you expanded to any other schools yet? Please provide details.**

A: Yes. We have expanded, and are currently at 5 middle schools in Montgomery County. We were originally at Key and Neelsville. We have now expanded to Loiderman, Clemente, and Argyle as well.

- 2. How do you determine which schools may benefit from participation in Truancy Court?**

A: Our office participates and meets once a month with other agencies that form the Truancy Review Board. The chairperson of the TRB (Truancy Review Board) is Steve Neff. Prior to expanding the program to another middle school, we meet with Steve Neff to determine the appropriate school. We look for the schools with high truancy rates and statistics that indicate students have more than 15% unexcused absences. We also try to be geographically diverse. We currently have two up county, two down county, and one mid county.

- 3. Please provide updated data (broken down by school) on the number of children who have been through the program, graduation rates, and impact on truancy and tardy rates.**

A: The following data represents the statistics for the 2012-2013 school year session of the TCP, as we do not have information on graduation rates for the TCP now in session. The chart summarizes statistics for Spring 2013, while the data following it represents the information we have for the overall 2012-2013 school year at Neelsville, Key, and Loiderman.

School	Participants	Graduates	Grad. %	% Reduction in Unex. Abs.
Neelsville	10	5	50%	49%
Francis Scott Key	13	8	62%	70%
Loiderman	7	6	86%	89%
Total Mont. County	30	19	63%	69%

Neelsville: 23 students/14 graduates (61%)/60% reduction in absences during the program.
Key: 17 students/11 graduates (65%)/71% reduction in absences during the program.
Loiderman: 7 students/6 graduates (86%)/89% reduction in absences during the program.

- 4. Your office has mentioned that it has been challenging to get judges to participate in the program due to their schedules. Are you still facing this challenge? What are your plans moving forward?**

A: Yes. It is not easy to get a judge from the court system to participate. District Court judge Sarsfield is currently the Truancy Court judge at Key middle School. The other four schools

have assistant State's Attorney's that act as the Truancy Court judge. We are recruiting attorneys through the local Bar Association. We have several people currently that are looking forward to us expanding to more schools so that they can participate in the Truancy Court Program.

School of Law

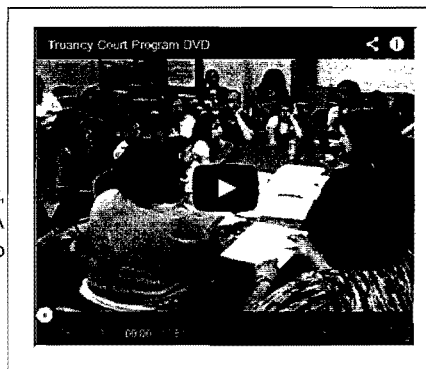
Truancy Court Program

Addressing Truancy and Attendance to Change Communities and Courts

Early intervention addressing problems that underlie truancy can prevent this behavior from leading to delinquency, crime, and violence. CFCC's Truancy Court Program addresses the root causes of truant behavior and links families to needed social services or other community-based supports.

Why focus on truancy?

There is a significant and growing body of research demonstrating that truancy is one of the strongest early predictors for teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, crime, dependency, dropout, unemployment, and more. A problem-solving approach to truancy reduces these risks and saves families and communities from serious and costly outcomes.



Schools and communities need to develop effective and evidence-based solutions.

What is CFCC's Truancy Court Program?

CFCC's Truancy Court Program (TCP) is an innovative, early intervention and holistic approach to truant behavior that addresses the root causes of truancy. The program, strictly voluntary on the part of students and their families, consists of ten weekly in-school meetings per session (with one session in the Fall and another in the Spring). The TCP meeting involves the student, his or her family, teachers, social workers, guidance counselors, principals, CFCC staff, a law student, and a volunteer judge. TCP students also meet weekly with a TCP mentor, who calls the home once a week to engage family members.

The purpose of the TCP meetings is to identify and address the reasons why each participating child is not attending school regularly and/or on-time. Once the causes of truant behavior are uncovered, the TCP team puts resources into place that target truant behavior and support the student's regular school attendance, graduation from high school, and, ultimately, service as a productive member of the community.

menting photography and theater, at the school to increase engagement and attachment to school among TCP participants and their peers.

Does the TCP work?

Data indicate that the TCP is making a dramatic difference in attendance rates and school behavior, with three quarters of the participants graduating and an average reduction in unexcused absences of 71% in the Fall 2011 session. Data also show that the TCP's impact extends throughout the school year.

In March 2012, CFCC Director and Associate Professor of Law Barbara A. Babb presented an overview of the TCP at the *National Leadership Summit on School-Justice Partnerships: Keeping Kids In School and Out of Court*.

Download her presentation [here](#) or learn more below.

Whom does the TCP target?

The TCP is based on an early intervention model and targets students who are "soft" truants – students who have from five to twenty unexcused absences in a semester – in the belief that this group still has academic, social, and emotional connections to the school. The TCP is a preventive program, attempting to address the underlying causes of truancy before it becomes chronic and more difficult to change.

The TCP has served approximately 1,000 students and their families since its inception in 2005.

Is TCP punitive?

The TCP is non-punitive. Like all of CFCC's programs, the TCP is based on a therapeutic and non-adversarial approach to the law. The TCP rewards students for positive behaviors and provides weekly incentives to encourage school attendance.

Graduations reward students who demonstrate a minimum 65% decrease in unexcused absences and/or tardies, improved behavior, and academic achievement. The First Lady of Maryland, the Honorable Catherine Curran O'Malley, hosts a yearly reception for all graduates and their families.

What is the TCP Mentoring Program?

"Character Building Classes" are held throughout the TCP session while students wait to meet with the TCP Judge. They cover issues ranging from listening skills to peer pressure to goal-setting and organization and are taught by professional TCP mentors. The TCP mentors also meet with students one-on-one, as needed, and communicate with parents at least once a week to ensure that they remain engaged, informed and empowered.

What other activities are associated with the TCP?

The Kids & Cameras Program teaches photography to TCP students. Students learn the history of photography, how to use photography to express certain emotions and theme, and basic photography skills.

The Kids & Theater Program exposes students to scripted acting and improvisation, based upon the students' interest. Trained teaching artists work with students to create improvised scenes that are converted into short plays. At the end of the ten-week program, students perform for family, friends and the community.

What are the TCP's Family Fun Activities?

The TCP provides all of its participants with an afternoon or evening of family-friendly activities to engage and support TCP families. These events are held at the school, are open to TCP participants and all of their family members, and include a pizza party and games or movies.

- Fund the TCP or one of its features at a school
- Sponsor breakfast for weekly TCP sessions
- Donate incentives, goods, and services
- Mentor and/or tutor TCP students
- Conduct read-alouds at a TCP school
- Sponsor a competition for perfect attendance, including prizes for schools/students/classes
- Participate in a pen pal program with TCP students
- Sponsor/participate in career days
- Conduct workshops on how to apply for college and/or how to apply for a job
- Organize drives to collect one or some of the following: alarm clocks, backpacks, coats, books, incentives, school supplies, etc.

If you are interested in becoming involved with the TCP, please contact [Gloria Danziger](#), CFCC Senior Fellow.

How do I get a TCP in my school or district?

CFCC has worked with many school districts to implement the TCP in targeted schools. We offer a menu of options, ranging from training and technical assistance to on-site operation of the program. If you are interested in addressing truancy in your school or district, please [contact us](#) to get started.

How can I get a copy of the Truancy Court Program Toolkit and Mentor Manual?

CFCC's [Truancy Court Program Toolkit and Mentor Manual](#) are available for sale. You can order your copy by downloading the [Truancy Court Program Toolkit form](#) and submitting the completed form to CFCC via [email](#), fax (410-837-5737), or [mail](#).

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